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By Richard Dyer

(c) 1982 Boston Globe Field News Service)

BOSTON - Claudio Abbado, seated on a couch in his hotel, was talking on the phone to Air France. His daughter Alexandra, 22, and his son David, 24, sat at his side and they were not happy — their luggage had been missing for three days, and they were getting tired of their clothes. The conductor, who was in the middle of a hugely acclaimed engagement with the Boston Symphony, was being patient and reasonable; once he even smiled into the telephone.

He seemed like a nice man, and so he proved in the subsequent half hour interview, though he is a man of few words. He responds to questions directly, but he doesn't volunteer anything, and the interview never turns into a conversation. His English is clear, but it is Claudio Abbado's eyes and his smile that are eloquent.

He began with the observation that this was a distressing way for his children to begin their first visit to America. Asked to recall his own first visit to America, Abbado laughed as he recalled the long journey that took him to the Tanglewood conducting seminar in the summer of 1958.

"That was the year my son David was born. I was studying conducting in Vienna with Hans Swarowsky. He was a great teacher. He taught not only technique but also how to study a score. He knew also about paintings and literature. Three of us came on his recommendation to Tanglewood that summer — Gustave Meier, Zubin Mehta and myself. I remember when I got here I didn't know what to do. I took a train to Pittsfield, and some people in the station there said they could take me in their car to Tanglewood. I told



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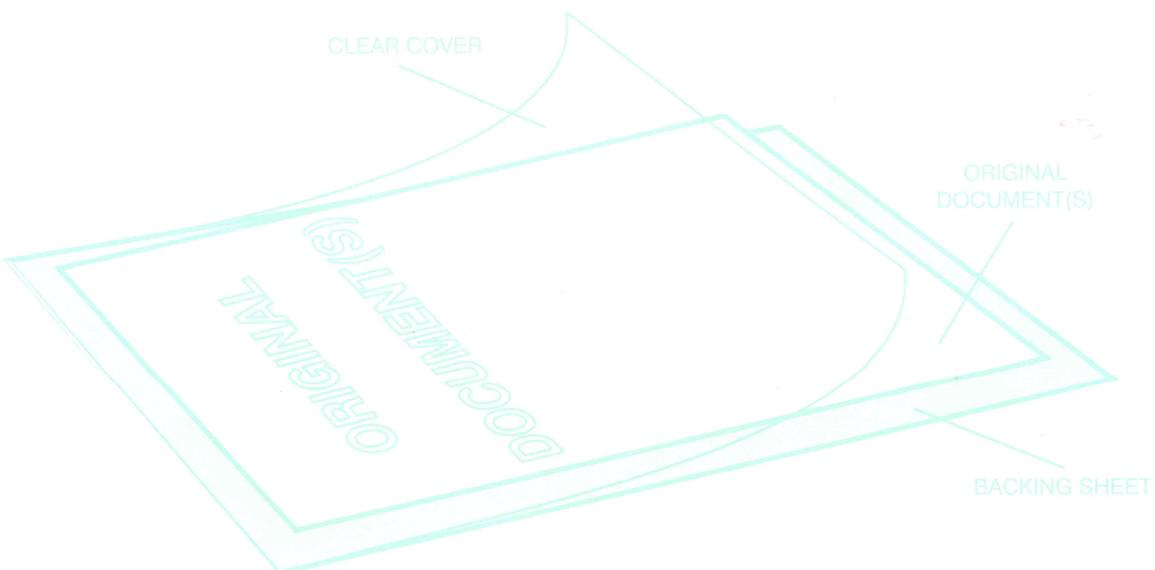
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them I had come to study and conduct, and when I got out of the car they said they hoped I would win the Koussevitzky Prize. I was surprised that they would say that, but when they came to the last concert, I did. It was a wonderful summer. Both Charles Munch and Pierre Monteux were there; Eleazar de Carvalho did most of the teaching, though."

Abbado was born in Milan on June 26, 1933, the son of a prominent violinist. The whole family was musical, and Claudio Abbado studied the piano for seven or eight years, participating in some chamber music concerts with his father and his brother Marcello. But it was always his "first idea" to become a conductor.

(A brief digression: Are Abbado's own children musical as well? Significant looks passed between them and the suggestion of a giggle. The father spoke. "David is in the university studying philosophy. Alexandra is working in theater administration.")

In 1963 he was a Mitropoulos Fellow of the New York Philharmonic, but by that same summer his career was fully launched when he conducted at the Salzburg Festival. In 1968 he conducted his first Verdi opera, "Don Carlos." By 1969 he was resident conductor of Italy's leading opera house, La Scala in Milan; since 1971 he has been music director there, though last year he abandoned all administrative responsibilities. He has been the principal guest conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra since 1979, a position he also holds with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

"Now I am in Chicago for five to six weeks a year. With the LSO I do 65 concerts in London and on tour. I am at La Scala for five or six months. I also give several concerts every year with the European Youth Orchestra. But does not leave any more space to come back to the Boston Symphony Orchestra soon. But I will conduct the LSO on tour in Boston next season. I will conduct the Mahler First, which I have never done here, and something of Stravinsky's."

Abbado is of course one of the world's preeminent conductors of



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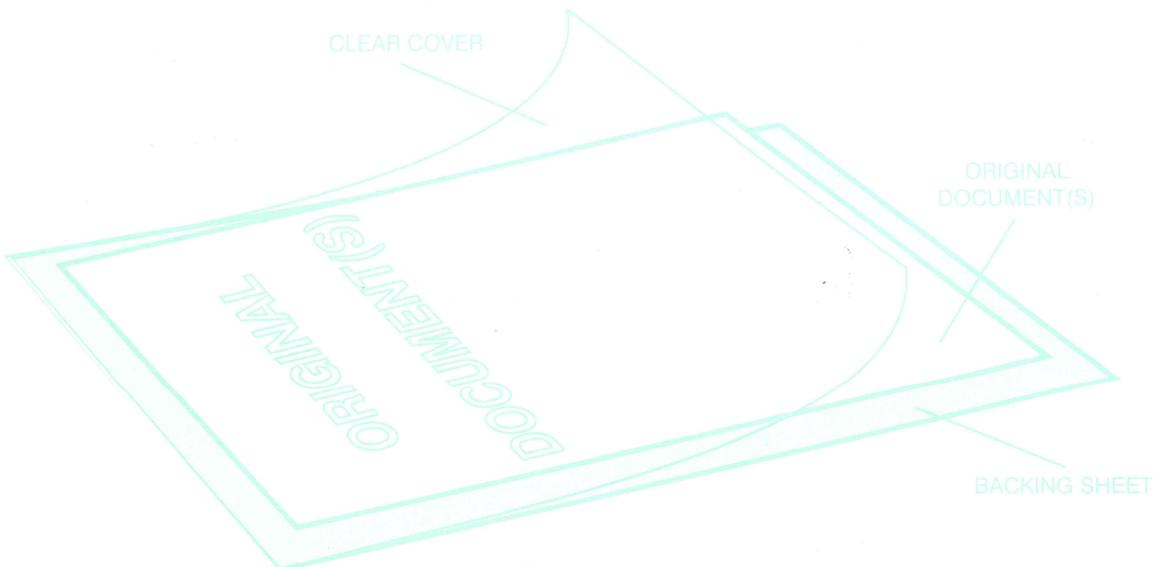
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Mahler's music; his greatest success in Boston was the 2nd symphony a few seasons ago, an occasion that was nearly matched by the 3rd Symphony of last week. He doesn't find it odd that an Italian conductor should excel in this music. "After all there is a good Austrian tradition in the north of Italy. I studied in Vienna, and when I was young I heard his music. Mitropoulos came to Milano to conduct Mahler, and so did Leonard Bernstein. But before 1956 Mahler was not played in Italy. One of the first things I did when I started at La Scala was start a whole Mahler cycle with the orchestra. By then the audience was ready."

Later the conductor will speak of how he has studied Mahler's music ("there are many detailed directions in the scores that you can read," he modestly says); he says as a matter of course that he has consulted the original manuscripts. It was in the manuscript of the 3rd Symphony that he found the composer's pencilled notation that the offstage posthorn solo could be played by a piston instrument, which is what he chose to have done here. Abbado seemed happy with the performances. "It is a nice orchestra that plays in the best hall. The orchestra is OK," he says, "and there are many good soloists. But for this piece I would like to have more strings. But the stage is not a big space. When I did the Mahler Second here they built a stage extension. When you have nine horns and such a large orchestration, you like to have more strings."

(MORE)

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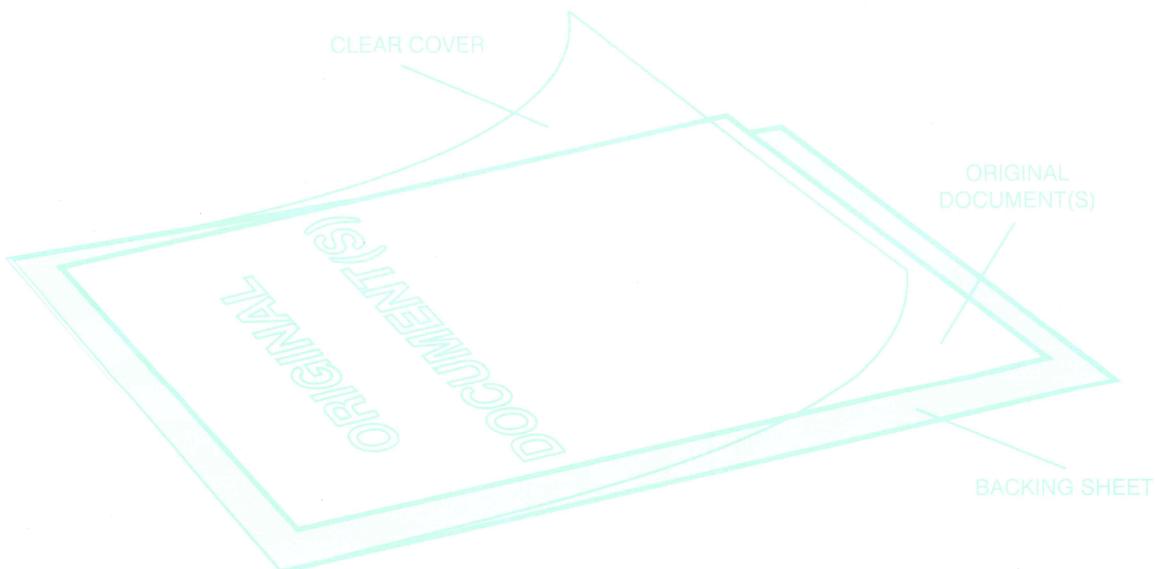
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Abbado's tenure at La Scala has been distinguished by his commitment to contemporary music as well as to the classics of the operatic and symphonic repertory. "We are the only big opera house that makes a world premiere every year. We have done operas by Nono, Busotti, Ligeti, Stockhausen, Penderecki; now Boulez is writing one that I hope will be ready by 1985." There has also been so much increased activity that there is a need for two orchestras now, one to play symphonies and the other to play in the pit; Abbado encourages all his players to play in chamber ensembles as well. Another innovation has been a series of opera films projected in the La Scala auditorium during the off-season.

"Sometimes I like the films, when they are well done. When they are not good I do not like that. But the films are good for the audience which cannot come to the opera because it is too expensive or because it is sold out."

His time at La Scala has not passed without controversy; on one occasion he had to resign in protest against budget cutbacks. "In our terrible situation in Italy everything financial is a problem. But La Scala is a special place, like an island, and somehow everything finally works out. Last year we were able to tour to Japan because the Japanese paid for everything. Now we are invited from Russia in 1984, but I don't think I will go. They did many nasty things when we did 'Boris Godunov' at La Scala. They withdrew several Russian singers when we engaged a young producer from Moscow that they did not approve of. On the other hand, it would be good to take 'Boris' to Russia because we use Mussorgsky's original



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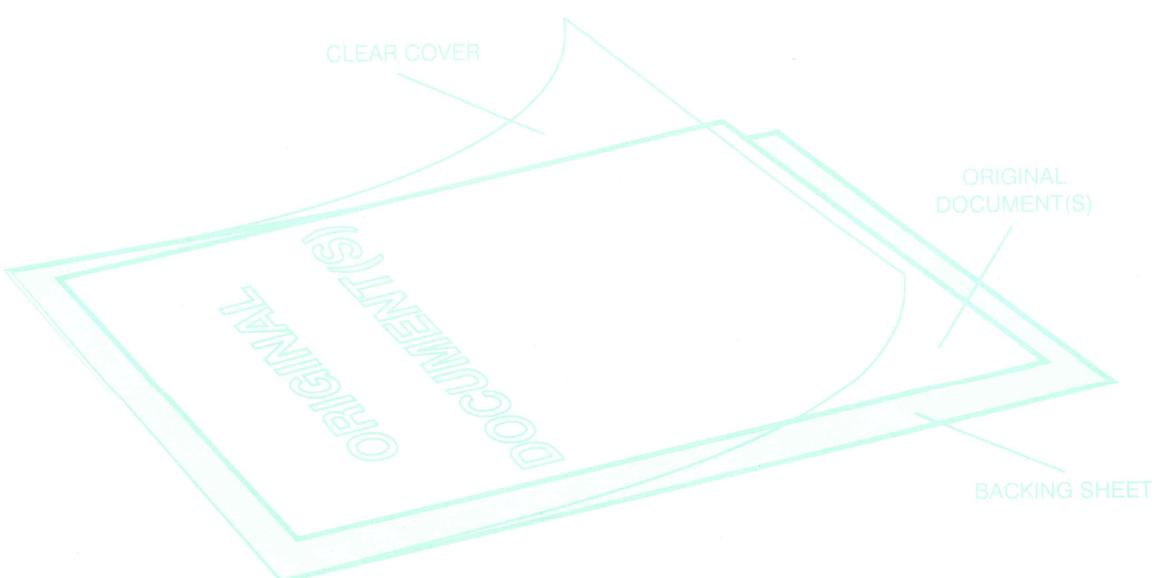
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version which no one in Russia knows. Abbado's face expresses amazement.

He himself is celebrated for his attention to textual detail, and not simply in the music of Mahler. His recordings of Verdi operas are famous; the next will be "Don Carlos," which he will perform in Verdi's last revision, the four-act version. But there will also be an "appendix" that will include all the music from the earlier music. "This will be very difficult for us because we will make the recording in French. In Italy we must play the opera in Italian in the theater, but for the recording it should be in French, because that is the language Verdi composed it in."

Now, for the first time, he is embarking on the operas of Wagner. He has just finished a run of "Lohengrin" at La Scala; in 1985 he will conduct it at Bayreuth and then record it. Why "Lohengrin"?

"Because it is great music and I love it."

Abbado's homes are in Milan and in London. He vacations in the Swiss mountains in the winter and on the island of Sardinia in the summer. "Always I must take six to seven weeks when I do not conduct. To make music one must make time to study."

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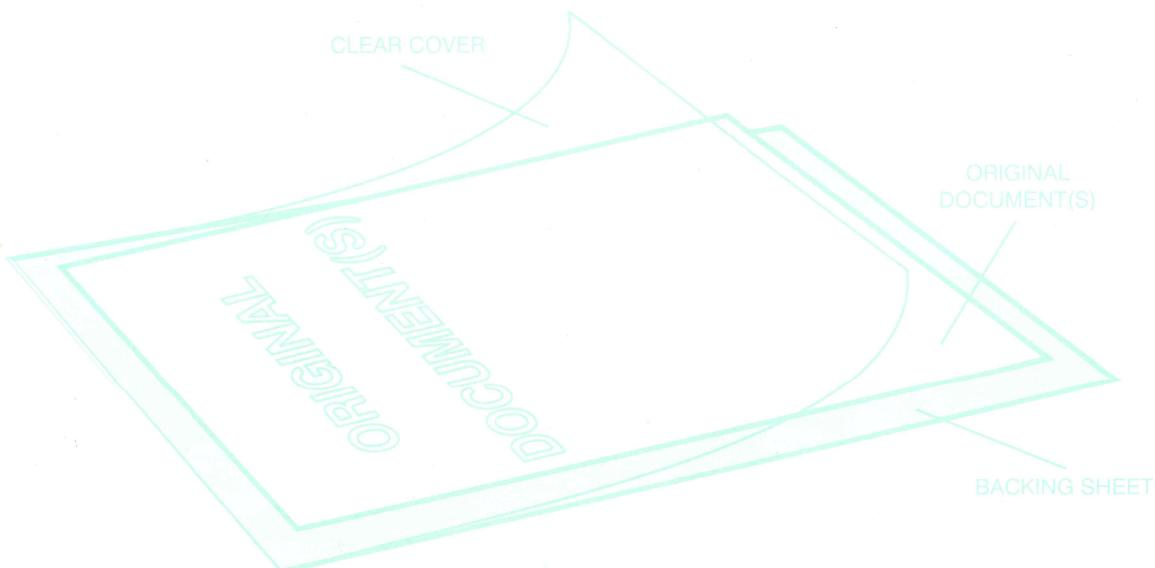
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## Interview with Claudio Abbado

Talking on "Ballo in maschera", his new "Aida" (planned for release in 1982), and other aspects of musical life.

*Do you think that "Ballo in maschera" has a special quality of its own, as is the case with many operas by Verdi?*

Abbado: I think you could say that, always with Verdi, you can understand the personality of a character from just one aria. That's true in the first scene of "Ballo", where the first arias for Riccardo and Renato establish them quite firmly in one's mind. But "Ballo" also has qualities that are unique. It has the most passionate love duet in all Verdi. Then there is the wonderful conspiratorial trio, advanced for its time. It also has that extraordinary passage near the end where the stage music continues through the death of Riccardo, which has some similarity with the death of Posa. By the way, I don't think he wanted those names changed back to the Swedish originals. Of course, we know why the libretto had to be changed in the first place because the Italian authorities didn't want a king assassinated on stage - but once the names Riccardo and Renato were set to music, I believe that Verdi wanted them kept that way. Anyway the details of a libretto didn't at this stage in his career mean so much to him; what mattered was the musical setting. Incidentally there is one small change I make in the orchestration. Toscanini made it because he said it was sanctioned by Verdi. This comes in the wonderful scene of drawing lots in Renato's study. At one point the score has only cellos, clarinets and basses. We have horns supporting the cellos: it sounds much better.

"Aida" is an amazing work when you think of the tremendous contrast between the triumphal and intimate scenes. In the former you have the full range of orchestration, in the latter Verdi reduces the accompaniment sometimes to one oboe or one bass clarinet. Again, as in "Ballo", the characters are finely delineated in their arias, and Verdi was able once more to establish a milieu. In "Don Carlos", you sense the devious, dark world of Spain at the time of Philip II; in "Aida", you feel that you are in Egypt. Of course "Ballo" doesn't have an American feeling! Indeed, if you are Italian, I think you can sense that the music derives directly from Parma or Busseto, directly from the Emilia region. It's

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a particular kind of passion in the music, which is quite different from say the feeling of Neapolitan music.

In this case the libretto wasn't so important for Verdi; he was simply making music in the way he knew best and drawing upon his own milieu for its expression.

*How have you chosen your casts for "Ballo" and "Aida"?*

Abbado: Well, the singers have nearly all worked with me on their roles at La Scala. Ricciarelli is, of course, a notable Amelia. Although she hasn't sung Aida on stage to date, I think she makes the part very moving on the records. Domingo has recorded Radames and Riccardo in the past, but he has not always been happy with the results. He believes that he has now learnt how to project the right sound on disc. Obraztsova is a formidable Amneris.

*What advantages do you have working with "Deutsche Grammophon"?*

Abbado: Well, most important is that I can record the right repertory with the right orchestra. We do Verdi opera with La Scala, Mahler with the Chicago Symphony and the Vienna Philharmonic, Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and Strauss with the London Symphony and so on.

*Why haven't you yet conducted any of the verismo repertory?*

Abbado: That's only a question of finding time. It's the same with Wagner, and I'm happy that in the coming season I will conduct "Lohengrin" for the first time, at La Scala. With verismo, I would certainly like to conduct Puccini, but I'm not certain about the other composers. Of course, performances that you hear often influence your reactions. For years, I didn't like Tchaikovsky because I had heard poor interpretations of his music when I was young. One day I realised how wrong I was; it may be the same with verismo opera. You really have to study the scores before you can make a real decision about how you feel about any piece of music.

*What does La Scala mean to you?*

Abbado: Well, of course, it's one of the world's great opera houses. That goes without saying, but there's more to it than that, which is hard

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to explain. I think it has something to do with the very deep stage and the wide pit. It reacts on you, perhaps more on singers than on anyone else. I myself have been brought up with it. I recall vividly the rehearsals when Toscanini was invited to re-open the house after the war, but even before that I remember concerts there conducted by Antonio Guarnieri, especially a performance of Debussy's "Nocturnes". I was only six or seven, but the impression was indelible.

*You appear to be an intellectual rather than a passionate man, and in that way differ from many Italians. Is that a fair impression?*

Abbado: Not quite. I may not show much passion on the outside, but within I'm quite different. I don't believe in making too many gestures on the podium. It's not necessary. You should reserve them for certain climactic points in any work. I have always been introverted and shy. I don't show my emotions easily. I don't speak often at rehearsals: you can't talk to the players, after all, at the concert. I prefer to use just my eyes.

*How do you work with producers and singers?*

Abbado: At piano rehearsals, I insist that the music must come first. I try to convince singers to achieve what the composers want. In Verdi, wherever possible, I try to get a long line - but the singers do have to breathe! We may try the same passage four or five times till we get it right. Very often we find that they can manage a passage in a single breath when they thought they needed to breathe more often. I work out a plan with a producer months in advance; even if they are not musicians, producers should be musical if they are going to work in opera. Strehler, for instance, is ideal in that respect.

*Do you have any favourites among the operas you conduct?*

Abbado: Maybe I like "Don Carlos" and "Boccanegra" most of all, simply because they are in some ways problematic pieces and so present the greatest challenge. Both were revised and altered by Verdi - and so were obviously very special to him. I like to look at why he made the changes. I would love to record "Don Carlos" in the original version, that is in French, and with an extra record incorporating the music that was eventually cut by Verdi.

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*If you had not been a conductor, what would you have liked to be?*

Abbado: Maybe an architect, like my younger brother, or perhaps a writer or an actor. Something creative, certainly.

*Is there anything in your professional life that you're particularly proud of?*

Abbado: Yes; the European Youth Orchestra. I love to work with young people because they are so sincere and enthusiastic, and I think I have a rapport with them because they are not yet spoilt by the world. I hate routine - and young people are the same. In general, my aim is always to seek for more out of the music I conduct, never to be satisfied with what I've achieved. That's what I admire particularly in my colleague Carlos Kleiber. You'll find that in his "Tristan" records.

*Do you listen much to other conductor's performances?*

Abbado: Yes, there is always something to be learnt from listening to the interpretations of musicians such as Toscanini, Bruno Walter, Mitropoulos and Furtwängler, who was supreme in the German repertoire. As for my own records, I only listen to them when I'm going to conduct the same work again, and then I always feel I could do it better now.

# information



GIUSEPPE VERDI (1813-1901)

Un Ballo in Maschera

A Masked Ball

Opera in three acts

Libretto: Antonio Somma (after Eugène Scribe)

Riccardo, Earl of Warwick,

Governor of Boston . . . . . Placido Domingo

Renato, creole,

his secretary . . . . . Renato Bruson

Amelia, Renato's wife . . . Katia Ricciarelli

Ulrica, fortune-teller . . . Elena Obraztsova

Oscar, page . . . . . Edita Gruberová

Silvano, sailor . . . . . Luigi De Corato

Samuel ) conspirators . . . Ruggero Raimondi

Tom ) . . . . . Giovanni Foiani

A judge . . . . . Antonio Savastano

A servant to Amelia . . . . . Gianfranco Manganotti

Coro e Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala

(Chorus master: Romano Gandolfi)

Maestro del coro dei bambini: Vittorio Sicuri

Maestro della banda: Gabriele Bellini

Conductor: Claudio Abbado

In collaborazione con L'Ente Autonomo  
del Teatro alla Scala

Set (3 LP) 2740 251

(3 MC) 3378 111

Recorded: December 1979/January 1980, Milan

Production: Rainer Brock . Prof. Michael Horwath

Coordination : Gianfranco Rebullia

Recording Supervision: Rainer Brock

Recording Engineer : Hans-Peter Schweigmann

# Newsweek

MUSIC



Pollini in New York: Playing the field from Mozart to Stockhausen

## PIANO CONVERSATIONS

In 1960, when Maurizio Pollini won the prestigious Warsaw Chopin Competition at the age of 18, Arthur Rubinstein remarked: "Technically, he already plays better than any of us on the jury." The master's blessing was in fact mixed. Even though the young Italian pianist shortly thereafter took the unusual step of dropping out for a few years to deepen his studies, his blazing concert career since then has been dogged by the nagging question: is the great technician also a great artist?

On the evidence of Pollini's latest recitals in New York, the question can be put to rest. Now 37, the steel-fingered ex-wunderkind has matured into a great keyboard artist of the rarest sort—one who plays with note-perfect accuracy and meticulous respect for the composer's intentions while asserting his own highly personal ideas and feelings about the music. If Horowitz explodes, Pollini implodes. An unassuming figure at the keyboard, he constructs elegantly proportioned, clearly defined chambers of sound in which every sort of musical conversation can be conducted—from Mozart to Stockhausen.

**EAVESDROPPING:** Brought up in a cultured Milanese family (his father was one of Italy's pioneering modern architects), Pollini says: "I try to play everything I like." Those "likes" give him what is perhaps the broadest repertoire of any topflight pianist in the world today, but there is nothing

helter-skelter about his programs, which are as thoughtfully conceived as his interpretations. Attending a Pollini recital affords much more than the opportunity to hear a spectacular virtuoso at work: it's a chance to eavesdrop on a discussion in which great musical minds square off against each other across the years—and even centuries.

Beethoven, Liszt and Boulez at the same round table? In his first recital, Pollini brought the great classicist, the great romantic and the great modernist together and revealed that, despite their radical differences of musical language, they had much in common. Thus, Beethoven's "Appassionata" Sonata "encouraged" the troubled, almost atonal meditations of four late piano pieces by Liszt—which in turn paved the way for the twelve-tone ferocities of

Boulez's Sonata No. 2 of 1948, whose complex architecture Pollini managed to make completely transparent. ("It might be interesting to play the Beethoven after the Boulez," he said afterward, "but you can't. After I finish the Boulez, the piano tends to be out of tune.")

**FEVERISH SEARCH:** That program was just a warm-up for last week's recital in Carnegie Hall, in which Pollini brought together two of the nineteenth century's most imaginative romantics, Schumann and Chopin. Celebrated for their frailties of the spirit, these tortured souls were exposed for what they really were: two powerful geniuses who would have been horrified at the myths of romantic excess that have enshrouded them.

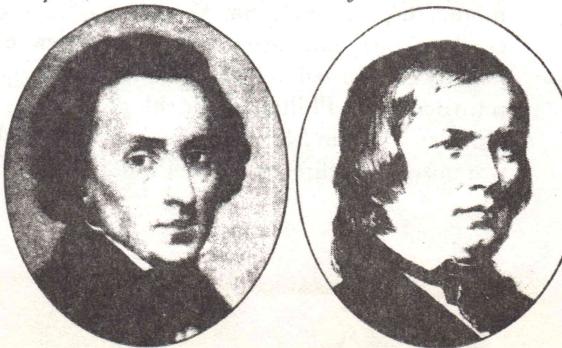
Their reunion began with Schumann's last work for piano, the seldom-performed "Songs of the Morning," written in 1853, the year before his attempted suicide and mental breakdown. Pollini's quiet, almost puzzled playing of these five short pieces asked a leading question: were these romantics interested in maintaining a sense of order—for all their flights of fancy? They were—and they weren't—was the answer provided by Schumann's Sonata No. 1 in F sharp minor, which Pollini turned into an almost unbearable psychodrama of a young artist's feverish search to give coherence to his tempestuous feelings.

Chopin's way of dealing with such matters was to dress up pathos with an elegance that, as a century of dreadful salon pianists has demonstrated, can easily become prettiness. One risk is in deciding how to deal with rubato—the deviations from strict tempos so necessary to the romantic style. Chopin once described correct rubato as "like a tree whose trunk stands firm, while its branches and leaves yield to passing breezes." If Pollini's breezes in his playing of the extravagant "Fantasie in F minor" occasionally threatened to become cyclonic, the trunk stood absolutely firm throughout.

**RECONCILIATION:** The most pointed confrontation between the two great romantics was saved for last—Chopin's sprawling "Funeral March" Sonata in B flat minor, whose disparate, free-associating movements Schumann once deplored as "four of [Chopin's] most reckless children." Pollini's approach to these unruly brats was to treat them as elements of a titanic musical battle, which he portrayed with such blistering urgency that the very future of music seemed at stake. As he swept through the concluding presto, he seemed to be suggesting that the battle had ended in an apocalypse. But as an artist of the most well-tempered passions, he returned with three Chopin encores, ending—in a spirit of reconciliation—with the famous "G minor Ballade," which Schumann happened to have praised at the time as Chopin's "most spirited, most daring work."

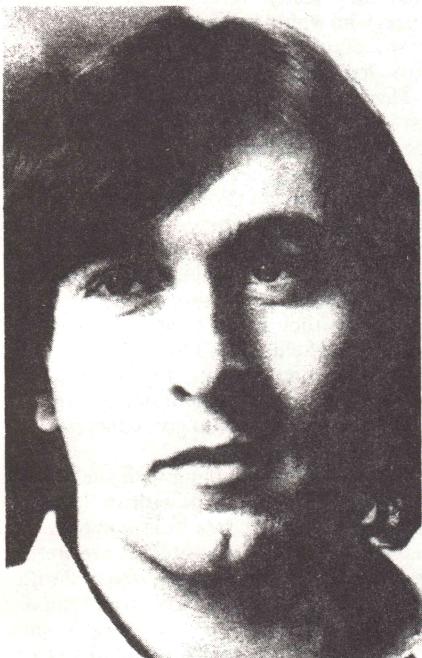
CHARLES MICHENER

Chopin and Schumann: Reunion of the romantics



# Claudio Abbado: Milan's Musical Aristocrat

**Dorle J. Soria**



Claudio Abbado: running La Scala still allows time for much else, including the New York Philharmonic



The First Family of music in Milan is the Abbado family. It is dominated by Claudio Abbado, artistic director and chief conductor of La Scala, a post hallowed by the names of De Sabata and Toscanini. Claudio is the son of Michelangelo Abbado, composer, musicologist, teacher, author, and once the first violin of the La Scala Orchestra. He is the brother of Marcello, pianist and head of the Verdi Conservatory, whose son Roberto, at twenty-three, has already begun a career as opera conductor.

Recently Maestro Gianandrea Gavazzeni told us this cradle-to-grave tale circulating in Milan which illustrates the influence of the Abbado clan. A boy applies for admission to the Conservatory; he is told he must be approved by its director, Marcello Abbado. He graduates and looks for a position at La Scala; he learns he needs the sponsorship of Claudio Abbado. He composes an opera and brings his score to the publishing house of Ricordi; he is informed it must be submitted to Luciana Abbado (sister of Claudio). He reaches pension age and seeks admission to the Casa di Riposo, the home for aged musicians founded by Verdi; he finds his application must be passed by the president, Michelangelo Abbado. . . .

We saw Claudio Abbado in March when he was guest conductor of the New York Philharmonic. He bears his family aura and personal fame lightly. He is unaffected, intelligent, and attractive, and speaks English well. He looks younger than his forty-six years. We attended his concerts—in particular, a memorable Mahler Sixth—and we watched him preparing Ligeti's *Lontano* and the Tchaikovsky Fifth. There was no doubt of the communication, human and musical, between himself and the orchestra. But in rehearsal he wasted no words. His instructions were in musical terms, his beat was clear. He sat on a high stool, rising occasionally at points of climax. His baton was often a whiplash. He is a slim, romantic figure on the platform. His dark silky hair hangs rather long in the back and falls over his eyes as he moves. When we were at Kennedy Center during La Scala's Bicentennial Year visit, a woman next to us exclaimed rapturously: "Hasn't he beautiful hair!" We told Abbado later and he laughed. He said that when he was guest with the Philadelphia Orchestra a lady had come backstage to ask him what shampoo he used. We noticed that during rehearsals he wore glasses but not at the actual concert. A small touch of vanity? We did not ask.

Back at the Philharmonic for the first time since 1970, Abbado praised the improved acoustics of the hall and he was outspokenly happy with the orchestra. "There is so much more enthusiasm than last time. There are more young players, and they are very good." The Philharmonic is closely interwoven with the Abbado career. It was his first American orchestra. In 1963, when he won first prize in the Mitropoulos Competition, he spent a year at the Philharmonic as assistant conductor; Leonard Bernstein was then music director.

When Pierre Boulez announced that he was leaving the Philharmonic, there was talk that Abbado was among those considered as his successor. True or not, he would not have been in a position to accept. He was too heavily committed to La Scala, plus ties to orchestras here and abroad. He returned to the Philharmonic this past season because of an invitation from an old friend. Zubin Mehta, with whom he had shared student days in Vienna, was now music director of the Philharmonic. He could not say no to him.

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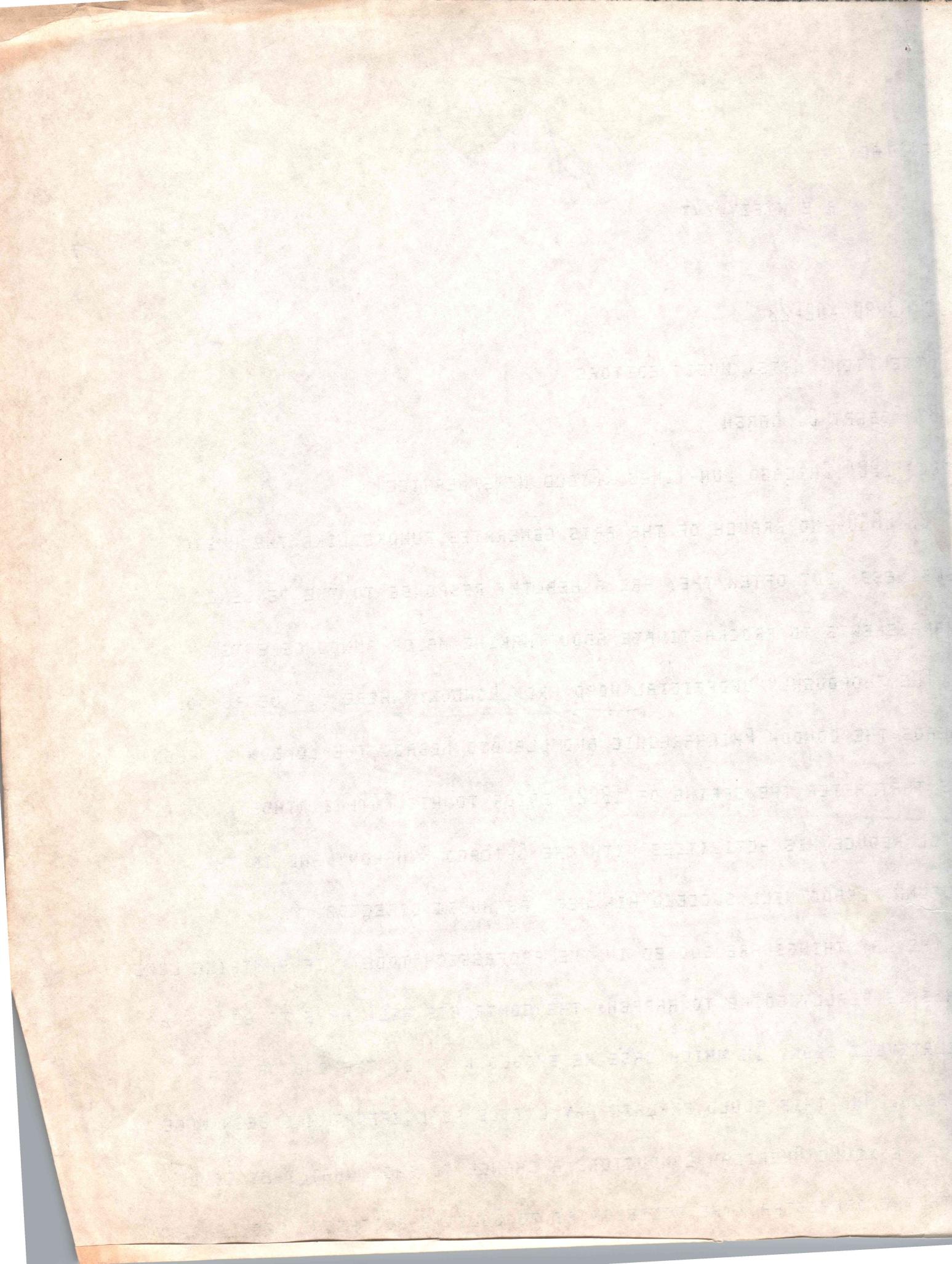
By ROBERT C. MARSH

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CHICAGO--NO BRANCH OF THE ARTS GENERATES RUMORS LIKE THE MUSIC BUSINESS; BUT OFTEN THEY ARE A HEALTHY RESPONSE TO THE TENDENCY OF MANAGEMENTS TO PROCRASTINATE ABOUT MAKING MAJOR ANNOUNCEMENTS.

THE THOROUGHLY UNOFFICIAL WORD FROM LONDON, WHERE SIR GEORG SOLTI HEADS THE LONDON PHILHARMONIC AND CLAUDIO ABBADO THE LONDON SYMPHONY, IS THAT AFTER THE SPRING OF 1982, PRIOR TO HIS 70TH BIRTHDAY, SOLTI WILL REDUCE HIS ACTIVITIES WITH THE CHICAGO SYMPHONY AND IN THE AUTUMN ABBADO WILL SUCCEED HIM HERE AS MUSIC DIRECTOR.

THE WAY THINGS ARE BOOKED IN THE PROFESSION TODAY, IF ANYTHING LIKE THIS IS REALLY GOING TO HAPPEN, THE CONTRACTS WILL HAVE TO BE SIGNED RELATIVELY SOON. IN WHICH CASE WE SHOULD KNOW BY THE END OF THE YEAR. AND THIS COULD EXPLAIN WHY LITTLE REAL EFFORT HAS BEEN MADE TO GIVE YOUNG AMERICAN CONDUCTORS A CHANCE TO SHOW WHAT THEY COULD DO WITH THE ORCHESTRA. THE DECISION AS TO SOLTI'S SUCCESSOR HAD LARGELY



SEEN MADE.

If, in fact, Abbado takes over from Solti in 1982, there would appear to be every reason for rejoicing. He is an excellent musician and an extremely likable human being with a quality of humility that is as attractive in conductors as it is rare. The orchestra in the years in which he has visited Chicago has come to give him both affection and respect.

In a performance this week, at the close of Beethoven's "Eroica," it refused to rise and made him accept the applause for this admirable performance alone. The orchestra made it clear they gave the credit to Abbado and they are the toughest critics of all. Abbado has deep-rooted American affiliations, wide ranging tastes, and good recording connections. (His recent discs for Deutsche Grammophon are comparable in every way with Solti's recent work for the microphone here.)

If he lacks some of the Solti glamour, he is well known internationally and widely respected for the best of artistic reasons. And at 46 he is young enough to lead the orchestra with distinction for many years.

ENDIT MARSH

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